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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS FR 002263

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2018

TAGS: PREL UNESCO PE

SUBJECT: KILLION MEETING WITH PERUVIAN AMBASSADOR TO UNESCO HARRY BELEVAN-MCBRIDE

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR LOUISE OLIVER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Offering a possible Latin solution to bring new candidates into the DG race, Peru's Ambassador to UNESCO suggested that journalist, author and essayist Vargas Llosa has expressed interest in running. He also discussed the problems posed by the rift within the Latin American electoral group, and the problems it could cause in the DG race. End summary.

¶2. (C) House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) Majority Staff Member David Killion met with Peru's Ambassador to UNESCO, Harry Belevan-McBride on 9 December at the Peruvian Ambassador's Residence. He was accompanied by Ambassador Oliver and Mission political specialist, David Ostroff.

¶3. (C) Mr. Killion began the meeting by explaining the purpose of his trip to Paris, which was to express the serious concern of the HFAC regarding the candidacy of Egypt's Farouk Hosni for the position of Director-General of UNESCO. Mr. Killion said that the HFAC was advising President-elect Obama's transition team on UNESCO matters, and wanted to communicate to both Member State representatives and key Secretariat managers that the incoming Democrats are likely to share the Bush administration's belief that Hosni, as an individual, was unacceptable. Killion also said that UNESCO is likely to be seen as an important vehicle for the Obama administration to further its "soft power" agenda, though Hosni's election as DG would seriously compromise UNESCO's potential, as far as the U.S. is concerned.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Oliver asked Ambassador Belevan-McBride about the possible candidacy of the highly respected Peruvian author, journalist and essayist, Mario Vargas Llosa. Belevan said that Vargas Llosa, who is an old friend, had told Peru's President Garcia that he was interested in the position, but Belevan said that he could honestly not see Vargas Llosa dealing with the day to day administration of the organization.

¶5. (C) Belevan also said that Vargas Llosa, in his syndicated column, had, over the years, irritated, provoked or angered everyone from Putin, to Garcia, China to Cuba, leaving no one unscathed. Belevan said that this might create some animosity to his candidacy, but Ambassador Olivier said that with proper preparation and a sophisticated public relations initiative, it might be possible to turn negative into positive, demonstrating Vargas Llosa's honesty and intellect. Adding that such a campaign would be difficult, but possible, Oliver said that Vargas Llosa's candidacy should not be automatically dismissed despite his candid comments over the years.

¶6. (C) Belevan also said that he feared that Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia and possibly Ecuador would break consensus with the Latin American group against Vargas Llosa. Belevan said, however, that the Cubans are serious in their diplomacy in terms of working with their Latin neighbors, and would probably not attack Vargas Llosa publicly, even if they decided not to join consensus. He added, on the other hand, that the Venezuelans would probably get up on the table and yell. Belevan said that it would be likely that Chile and Argentina would support a Vargas Llosa candidacy. (Note: Belevan also mentioned that Argentina is interested in floating Minister of Education Daniel Filmus as candidate for the presidency of the next UNESCO General Conference. End note.) Ambassador Oliver then asked

about the possibility of former hostage Ingrid Betancourt being supported by Colombia. Belevan said that though there have been some rumors about her running, he does not believe she is interested at this time.

¶7. (C) Returning to the possibility of Vargas Llosa's candidacy, Belevan said that it would be, in a sense, returning to UENSCO's intellectual roots, while also noting that Vargas Llosa is also a political animal, having run unsuccessfully for Peru's presidency in 1990. Ambassador Oliver said that in her conversations with different ambassadors, it was clear that everyone is looking for a candidate who will bring both stature and intellect to the organization, moving away from the competent functionary of the Matsuura mold, and will need to be able to articulate UNESCO's spirit to others in fluent French, English and/or Spanish.

¶8. Ambassador Belevan asked whether the U.S. would support another Arab candidate besides Hosni. Ambassador Oliver responded by saying that we want the best person possible, adding that if they come from the Arab world - great. Mr. Killion mentioned that the Mubaraks have worked hard to make sure that there is no other Arab candidate for the DG race, though clearly, there are other viable Arab candidates out there who have much greater stature than Hosni. Ambassador Oliver said that it would reflect badly on UNESCO as an organization if, in the end we were unable to get fellow Member States to present seriously qualified candidates, and were forced to choose from one Culture Minister and two relatively unknown ambassadors.

¶8. (C) Ambassador Oliver also told Belevan that other countries, like China, need UNESCO and, more importantly,, a UNESCO that the U.S. is a part of. She said that UNESCO gets its credibility from U.S. involvement, and added that others, including the Russians also need

UNESCOPARI 12152263 002 OF 002

a strong UNESCO for their public relations strategies of the moment. UNESCO Member States' inability to field strong candidates would be a sign of a weak and ineffective UNESCO.

¶9. (C) Regarding public criticism of Hosni, Belevan suggested that the Israelis should stay out of the picture, and let the U.S. and the Europeans take the lead in denouncing Hosni's book burning comments. Belevan ended the meeting by saying that he would definitely pass along Killion's message of a united U.S. position regarding the Hosni candidature when he meets with his Latin counterparts in the coming days.

OLIVER